



Roland Albert James Sadler

2nd Lieutenant, 78 Squadron Royal Air Force

Formerly 2nd Lieutenant, 1st Battalion Warwickshire Regiment

Formerly 43291 Private 6th Battalion and 1st Battalion Norfolk Regiment

He was killed in a flying accident on 23rd September 1918 at Hornchurch, Essex, aged 22. Roland was buried at Redenhall Churchyard.

Roland Sadler was a pioneer. 1903 saw the first powered flight of a heavier than air machine, less than seven and a half years later, in June 1910, the Royal Navy had its first Pilot, even though he had funded his training out of his own pocket. In November of that year the Royal Flying Corps was founded when the Royal Aero Club offered the Royal Navy two aircraft, the services of its members as instructors and the use of its airfield on the Isle of Sheppey. The Royal Flying Corps, Army based, was created in 1912 and later combined with the Royal Naval Air Service to create the RAF in 1918. At the start of the war, planes were used purely for reconnaissance, replacing the cavalry of previous wars; by the end of the war there were specialist bombers, fighters and reconnaissance planes and in opposition dedicated anti-aircraft guns; only 15 years after the first plane had hop skipped and jumped into the record books.

With technology advancing so fast and a lot of the improvements being a case of trial, experience and commensurate errors, fatalities could be high even without the added hazard of enemy fire. Training was lagging behind, there being very few experienced pilots to train novice pilots. In April 1917 the worst month for the entire war for the RFC (Royal Flying Corps), the average life expectancy of a British pilot on the Western Front was 69 flying hours.

Our Rowland had actually enlisted up in Norwich on April 6th 1915 and passed his medical on May 25th 1915, not as any brand of flyer but as a Private in the 6th Btn Royal Norfolk. Not quite 20 years old and at a fairly average, for the time, height, of 5ft 7 ½", he was a skinny wee lad with a fully expanded chest of 34 ½", 32 ½" when relaxed. However, it was judged his physical development was good and he was in! After 14 months with a home posting he was off into the Norfolk 1st Btn (or maybe 1/6th Cyclists Btn Norfolks) with a military number of 2144. Having agreed (not that I think there was much choice) in mid-March 1916, to being posted abroad he was sent off with the British Expeditionary Force on the 26th of July 1916. He had a slightly interesting military career. He left Folkstone on the 26th, having moved from the 6th Norfolks to the 1st Herts, he arrived at Bolougne a day later. By the day after that, on the 28th of July he was up with the main body of fighting troops. A fortnight after that he was back in the Norfolks, 1st Btn this time and carrying the number 43291.

He did not stay in France long, instead he was posted home 3 months later, and sent to act as a servant in the 1st Army School That lasted all of two months and then he was back with the 1st Norfolks again! Someone must have seen some potential in the lad as he did not stay in the ranks

long, 6 months after he re-joined his regiment he was sent back to England as a candidate for a Temporary Commission in the Infantry. Three weeks in a Training Reserve Btn and then sent of to the No 11 Officers Cadet Btn in Pirbright. He emerged from the training corps on the 27th of November 1917 and once again changed regiments, becoming a 2nd Lt in the Warwickshires from whom he transferred into the Royal Flying Corps although, by the time he died it had become the nascent Royal Air Force.

On the surface, there is nothing remarkable about this young man who had such an unusual military career. His family were not local, instead they came from Honing. Roland/Rowland/Rolland's father James was one of the middle(ish) of at least 13 children from a family of Agricultural labourers, his father, his older brothers and indeed himself all following that trade. On Christmas Day, 1895, James married Louisa Newland of Felmingham and set up home in Stalham. As so often happened, their first child Ethel Louisa arrived before the marriage, appearing aged 7 in the 1901 census. By this time James was no longer an Agricultural Labourer, instead he was following the trade of Coal Carter. Not long after the 1901 census, the family moved to Harleston where the next two children were born, resulting in a modest family of 5 children produced during the parents 15-year marriage. Roland, their oldest son, and first legitimate, child was at the age of 14 working as a Builder's Labourer whilst his father was now a Maltster's labourer.

Had the war not come along, doubtless Rolland would have carried on in the building trade, perhaps setting up on his account as he became more confident. Instead Rolland wound up in an entirely new world. I cannot emphasise again how new all this technology was, almost like the Apollo moon

programme

An inquest was held on Saturday in Kent on Flight-Lieut. Harwood James Arnold, R.A.F., aged 28, and George Harold Godfrey Walker, A.B., R.A.F., aged 19. Lieut. Arnold was piloting a Farman biplane, and Walker, the observer, was in charge of a Lewis gun. They were on a practice spin, when, at an high altitude of 800 feet, the machine burst into flames and crashed. Both men were killed instantly. The verdict was "Accidental death."

A sad fatality occurred near Acton on Saturday, the victim being a boy whose name is believed to be Hayward. Lieut. Sadler, R.A.F., was flying to North-West London, when, owing to engine trouble, he had to descend in a meadow. The boy, who was a mechanic at an aerodrome, went to the aviator's assistance. There was some difficulty in re-starting the engine, but suddenly the propellor flew round and struck the lad, whose ear was cut off. He died almost immediately.

opened up to a select elite of enlisted men and keen amateurs.

*Boston Guardian
30 Mar 1918*

Flying was a risky game, the machines were not always reliable as reported in an article of March 1918 when two men died, following their plane spontaneously combusting in mid-air. An adjacent paragraph describes a horrid start of Sadler's flying career. Having landed in a meadow a lad came running to assist him – working as a mechanic in an aerodrome he should have been both cautious and competent. Unfortunatel when the plane belatedly restarted, the lad was caught unawares and struck the lad. It does say his ear was cut off but I rather think he received more serious wounds, as he died shortly after.

6 months later and it was Sadler's death that was being reported in the papers. The subsequent Court O Inquiry The report that followed and was sent to Roland's father James, partly blames Roland for trying to lower the plane at too low a speed causing it to stall and spin, but mostly blamed faulty plugs of a type that had a track record of short circuiting and misfiring which would have seriously affected the performance of the plane.

KILLED.

Bell, Sec. Lt. A. R., R.A.F.	Press, Sec. Lt. H. W., R.A.F.
Churcher, Sec. Lt. E. C., R.A.F.	Preston, Sec. Lt. M. E., R.A.F.
Jones, Sec. Lt. A. T., R.A.F.	Sadler, Sec. Lt. R. A., R.War. R. & R.A.F.
Nicholls, Lt. E. C. H. R., R.A.F.	Strachan, Sec. Lt. A. R., R.A.F.

Weekly Casualty List (War Office & Air Ministry) London, England

15 Oct 1918

Sadler's body was returned to Redenhall and he was interred in the churchyard of St Mary's. In a final twist so appropriate to this chameleon of a military man, although Sadler enlisted as a private in the Norfolk's, worked his way through various battalions and regiments, was commissioned before being transferred into the RFC, still as a military man, and then was absorbed into the new RAF, his service was conducted by a Chaplain from the Royal Naval Service!

Compared to the small amounts that most families received from the estate of their private soldier relatives, a matter of pounds, Roland Sadler (now an officer) left the startling large sum of over £106 to his father James who was claiming to be an Esquire! I think this was rather more than pushing it for a labouring man or maybe this was a courtesy automatically offered to the father of an officer?

Although Roland did not die in the theatre of war, he would have been all too aware that every time his plane left the ground, he was risking life and limb – another Harleston Hero.

